

FEBRUARY 4, 1982

Outlying stations in the Shortgrass Country are getting a big break for the new year. According to what I learned in the coffee house in Mertzon this morning, some of the merchants in San Angelo have stopped taking all out-of-town checks. At the time of this writing, the scope of the ban is unknown; however, any amount of relief from the clearance sales and layaway bins in the Wool Capital is bound to be a big windfall for the area's husbands. Off hand, I can't think of a better break for the rural area than to be scorned by the Retail Merchant Association of San Angelo, unless the postal department would provide a backup by making mail-order catalogs illegal.

I'd been sensing that something was wrong over there. Four or five times in December, I'd noticed that the check-out girls were pretty thorough about the identification on my driver's license. I just figured it was because of the age and style of my hat and boots. Ever since the movie "Urban Cowboy" unleashed such a craze in western wear, I've felt like my wardrobe was coming from the alley behind the Salvation Army's depot.

The few airports I'd been in were so full of new ostrich hide and soft brims that I felt like I ought to be pushing a mop cart or maybe packing a tray full of pencils on a beer box. I'd got a new belt and mounting for Christmas, but the strain of the holiday feast had covered up that new adornment.

However, my source claimed that he'd been turned down at his cleaner's and at a restaurant because his bank was at Mertzon. Like I told him, I didn't blame the cafe for being afraid of a check that might take a couple of days to clear. As bad as the fish was the last time I'd eaten there, it'd be good judgment for them to collect in advance for the specialties on the menu.

Probate courts are mighty slow paying the deceased's bills. Add the possibility of a counter suit on the grounds of false advertising and double hygienic negligence, and I believe I'd support a chili joint that not only demanded cash, but required their customers to sign a lengthy "hold harmless clause" like doctors require of their patients.

Without bothering to call the local bank, I am going to guess that the amount of bad credit in the average small West Texas town is going to run somewhere around the chances of winning the Irish Sweepstakes in partnership with your brother-in-law. But let's suppose that in five years the town of Mertzon picks up eight deadbeats, and all eight of them write a bad check at a San Angelo restaurant and a cleaning establishment on the same day. I'd sure agree with the owners that I didn't want those hombres jumping town with a stomach full of my fish sticks wearing a pair of clean britches, even if the naptha in the pants smelled like the fried fish.

It seems to me that the big franchise stores and chain outfits have more excuse to dishonor out-of-town checks than the local merchants have. These huge purveyors of Oriental treasures are more aware of Japanese Yens and Hong Kong dollars than they are Mertzon checks or greenbacks. I imagine they've figured out that they don't want their patrons running through their monthly statements recalling where they got last month's hot deal on a red plastic gas can or that super buy on a synthetic plaid shirt. I know I'm not overly fond of seeing my brand on a swaybacked cow in another man's pasture.

Child Who Sits in the Sun is going to blame me for Angelo's new policy. I've been trying to ruin our credit rating for 20 years. Progress has eased my job. It's sure going to be tough to stay home and to save our money.